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ABSTRACT

The author begins his discussion of accountability with an examination of its development, including its historical origins and the role of the federal government. The evolution of accountability programs at the state level is also considered. Included are brief indications of the directions taken by Pennsylvania, Florida, Colorado, and Michigan. Before concluding with a discussion of the continuing challenge accountability presents to educators, the author takes a brief look at the negative reactions accountability has elicited from legislators, administrators, teachers, and students. (IRT)

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OSSC BULLETIN

EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY--
GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

by

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FOREWORD

Calvin M. Frazier is a University of Oregon graduate and a former Graduate Research Assistant in the Field Training and Service Bureau at the University. He is now the State Commissioner of Education for the state of Colorado.

"Educational Accountability--Good News and Bad News" was originally presented as an address to the National Forum on Educational Accountability meeting in Denver, Colorado May 8-9, 1975. The theme of that conference and of this Bulletin reflect the growing concern of educators and publics across the country for increased accountability in education.

"Educational Accountability--Good News and Bad News" provides a historical framework from which to view the accountability movement, raises questions regarding accountability in education, and provides perspectives from which to view the future of accountability in education.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary
Oregon School Study Council

EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY--GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

Where did it all begin? Five years ago, few people would have predicted that educational accountability would occupy a central position on the educational stage of the mid-'70's. Some attribute all of the furor, debate, and thousands of writings regarding accountability to Leon Lessinger, now Dean of the School of Education at the University of South Carolina. Often referred to as "the father of accountability," Dr. Lessinger was perhaps the first to articulate this concept a few years ago while he served in the U. S. Office of Education. But many educators have been quick to point out that while the term may be a recent one to the educational jargon, accountability has, in fact, been with us for some time.

In early days it was not uncommon for a teacher to receive his/her room and board from parents in exchange for teaching their children. The teacher shifted his residency periodically from family to family and was always under scrutiny. It was a simple accountability cycle. A single family or several families acting collectively would retain a teacher to give instruction to the offspring. The determination of the program, the presentation of the curriculum, and the evaluation of the learning took place in a simple and direct manner.

But the circle grew and became more complex. The number of participants increased. A teacher joined with other teachers. A head teacher emerged and finally a leader called a "principal." As the student numbers grew, a superintendent was hired and local school board members began to serve as representatives of all the parents of the community. Eventually, states formed state boards of education and state departments, while federal agencies, HEW and USOE, also came into the picture. The system has become a gigantic one that has become entwined with employee organizations such as the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the American Association of School Administrators, as well as the PTA, National School Boards Association, and special interest groups such as American Education Research Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and many others. Many people call it a sophisticated delivery system. Some are less kind, calling it, variously, a self-perpetuating system, a complex system that feeds on itself and has forgotten its purpose, a monstrosity, a dollar-eating bureaucracy, an alien, unfriendly environment.

So from the early days of a rather tight-knit parent/teacher/student cycle operating close to the family unit, education is now a major societal effort involving approximately 18,000 school districts, 2 million teachers, and 45

million public school students. The direct, simple accountability process of the early years perhaps has not been lost, but it's safe to say that the process has been buried in an organizational maze until recent years when Lessinger and others have begun suggesting that accountability is a concept that educators must address or face further loss of credibility with the public.

Thus began our "era of accountability"--a period of time when the basic purposes of education are being examined, assumptions previously accepted are being tested and the education community and the public at large appear to have come to at least a mild confrontation in most parts of the country. Accountability has at times seemed almost like the harbinger of conflict and disruption than the vehicle for unity and improved student learning, as many of us in education had hoped. To some of us, accountability is a loaded but rather simple sequence involving answers to at least four basic questions regarding our educational programs:

Where are we going?

How do we get there?

How do we judge our progress?

How do we report our progress?

As a college professor, I began looking at our administrative preparation programs in this light. Later, as a deputy superintendent, I sought to apply these questions to the day-to-day operation of a school district of 35,000

students, and for the last two years have found this sequence to have meaning in approaching the planning responsibilities of a Chief State School Officer in a state having over half a million students and expenditures of 300-400 million dollars annually. I say these things to let you know "where I'm coming from" in viewing the events of the last few years.

We are all concerned with the educational endeavors of our country and sensitive to the developments in this arena. Many of us have been personally involved in some phase of an accountability thrust. To give a common base for discussion, let us review some of the developments in accountability over the last five years.

It was at the federal level that Dr. Lessinger first approached the need for an accountability process, and the influence there would appear to be substantial. Most federal programs require specification of objectives, activities designed to achieve these ends, an evaluation plan, and a reporting procedure. Certain programs also call for heavy parental involvement. In addition, on-site performance-type audits are employed in some of the titles of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act). The federal commitment to accountability is a deep one, and one that is due to increase and become even more refined. There has been criticism voiced by some that the process--because of the magnitude of the effort and the demanding timelines provided for in the legislation and the regulations--has been only superficially

utilized to date in many instances. While this is probably accurate, the federal mandates as they relate to elements of accountability have probably done more to sensitize educators to a systematic way of looking at a project than any other single stimulus in the country.

Commissioner Bell has indicated great support for the accountability process and advocated use of MBO--Management by Objectives--as a management system that provides a "road map" for a local district and one that can be a source of momentum to local school improvement. With this kind of support in the U. S. Office of Education, coupled with the obvious Congressional interest, it is difficult to see any reduction in the accountability emphasis from Washington. In fact, at this level we may see a heightened stress on accountability components.

At the state level, a great variation in approach can be seen. Through 1974 approximately 30 states had enacted some type of legislation. Others had provided for accountability through rules/regulations adopted by state boards of education. In some instances states have approached accountability through state assessment programs, personnel evaluation programs, accreditation, a comprehensive system involving all of the accountability elements, or an approach such as PPBS which ties the planning and programming to the budget system. What are some of the impressions one gets from these programs? For example:

Pennsylvania has taken an interesting approach involving the identification of 10 Goals of Quality Education and the instrumentation to judge a district's standing in regard to these goals along with some relative understanding of how a district stands in regard to districts having similar resources. This probably is a unique undertaking because of Pennsylvania's effort to utilize goals outside of the basic skill areas and to make some judgment as to student progress in achieving these goals. The concern might rest in the degree to which districts follow through and utilize such information.

Florida has placed considerable importance on a Statewide Assessment Program, an impressive program in terms of its emphasis on the individual school results and the identification of specific objectives for certain skill areas at selected grade levels. While there seems to be appreciation for the testing and measurement expertise back of the plan, some concerns surface regarding the emphasis on test results alone in certain disciplinary areas and on the mechanics of the process.

In Colorado we have tried the comprehensive approach. That is, each district has been charged with establishing a local acccountability committee and with building a system with all of the key accountability concepts. Much local latitude is allowed with no state assessment

program involved. After four years in operation, the program seems to have certain recurring problems: 1) the difficulty of the large district to incorporate the approach into its routine operation, and 2) the statewide problem of relating a district's identified goals and objectives to an implementation and evaluation plan.

Michigan has been a key state in terms of the breadth of the accountability effort there and in the apparently strong reaction by the Michigan Education Association membership. The Michigan plan is a well-conceived, six-step plan to achieve improvement recommendations for local and state board of education consideration. Substantial time and resources went into the refinement of the testing program, needs analysis, and statement of objectives. But despite this investment, the state became one of the major centers of controversy when the Michigan Education Association, with the support of the NEA, issued an assessment of the Michigan accountability plan after examination by Professors Rivers, House, and Stufflebeam. The able State Superintendent, John Porter, a strong advocate of the system developed, suddenly found that he was the focus for accountability critics throughout the country, and what started with great promise has apparently become handicapped by political

challenges and an ongoing expression of concern by Michigan teachers.

One final example should be noted. The New York City Board of Education and the United Federation of Teachers negotiated a commitment to develop a professional accountability effort in cooperation with institutions of higher education, community school boards, and the parent organizations. An entire accountability plan focusing at least initially on reading, mathematics, oral and written expression, and attendance was one plan growing out of this agreement. The plan is interesting because of the detailed procedures for organizing the effort, selecting various school characteristics to be considered in evaluating the test data, in phasing-in procedures, and in the operational definition--namely, that accountability is the acceptance of responsibility for consequences.

Through Colorado's involvement in the Cooperative Accountability Project and the state's own legislatively mandated accountability program, I have had relatively frequent opportunity to observe the reactions associated with implementation of this process across the country. The reactions have been quite diverse. Let me dwell on some of the negatives only at this point to emphasize the challenges we face in getting the accountability process understood and internalized.

Legislators have seen accountability as a handle to getting some feedback on the system that consumes a major part of a state's budget. But their optimism has dwindled and turned to frustration as they have watched both slower implementation than expected and the development of obstacles unforeseen in the early stages. What might have been a means of improving the relationship between legislators and educators appears now to have become one more indication to some of the legislative skeptics that educators are "foot-draggers" and not to be fully trusted.

Administrators have felt that accountability has been imposed on them by the state--another encroachment on local autonomy, another task not fully understood--and rather than seeing it as something to help them with their decision-making, as proponents claim, administrators have often felt threatened by the process and unsure of the mechanics of it. This situation is complicated by a tendency on the part of many school board members to feel that accountability offers hope for getting hold of their particular job. They seem to have come to feel concern about a superintendent and central staff or principals who "can't make the darn system work," as one board member stated recently.

Teachers have had their frustrations with accountability, too. In some cases, accountability legislation was almost specifically aimed at teachers, a reaction in part to tenure law frustrations and to the rise in collective bargaining

agreements. Teachers found in too many instances that they were the chief implementors of a system developed without their involvement--a situation a little like sitting in the eye of the hurricane knowing that you are soon to be pounded by the winds. Teachers were launched into writing behavioral objectives, and more objectives, and more objectives, or the objectives were developed apart from their classroom or school and became their responsibility to implement as some phase of a state assessment pattern. The reaction has been predictable. Many teachers have been seen as unwilling to accept responsibility--and be accountable--when their voices have been raised to protest the mechanics of such a plan.

A further problem has developed among local building and local district staffs when the accountability plan has "zeroed in" on a few of the more measurable disciplines, such as reading and mathematics. Teachers in other areas such as home economics, art, or physical education have not been involved. Staffs became split as some teachers spent their entire time on accountability implementation while others were left to carry on building-wide studies regarding such issues as discipline, attendance, and schedule changes.

Even students have become involved in the movement and have been brought into the process. Colorado has made such an effort. But too often, students have felt the impact only through an increasing number of tests and through subtle manners have experienced a change in curriculum to reflect

more measurable objectives. As a result, some have seen the threat of a de-humanizing school experience that is accepted because it is more amenable to quantification than to individual growth. I don't think this has to be the case, but it has to be listed as one of the generalized concerns raised in the last few years.

Other general alarms have been sounded. Long-smoldering concerns about the actual sophistication of our testing programs have surfaced in recent years because of the key role of evaluation in the accountability process. "How valid and reliable are these instruments used to verify growth in academic skills?" is a question heard often now in the profession.

If we cannot feel confidence in our measurement of progress, how far can we go in accountability? And if this is a weakness, what justification do proponents have for suggesting that staff members can be evaluated on the basis of student growth? This is a question that is not being raised in many states, but is one that rests naggingly in the minds of many educators.

These concerns appear to be some of the major issues and questions in regard to the accountability movement as it stands in 1975. Some have said this movement will be replaced by a growing interest now in alternative schools, or "options," in education, the latter term being my preference. Some have seen career education or dropout and retention efforts as displacing accountability.

Maybe. But even in these movements, accountability questions must be addressed because they ultimately come to have validity only as they deal with the purposes of education. If we cannot answer such basic questions in accountability, there is little hope for the questions to be resolved through another movement.

The concept of accountability is too powerful to set aside. As monstrous as some of the problems seem, a way must be found to give direction, purpose, and meaning to education. School staffs have too often, consciously or unintended, avoided facing dialogue over the reasons for their existence. Let's assume that schools have a responsible role in society. Who and how should the goals and objectives be established to reflect individual and societal needs?

Once goals are identified, how are these ends to be achieved? One of the most challenging and creative accountability tasks is to relate the goals and objectives to a program. So who, when, and how the machinery responds to these objectives become critical decisions.

The judgment as to the progress made is perhaps the most difficult component. How do we evaluate the <u>total</u> impact of a system change without seeming as the blind man touching one part of the camel? This is a complex phase, but as a country that reached to the moon, surely we can judge the development and growth of an elementary student, although the effort may be no less difficult than moon exploration.

And finally, who should be accountable to whom and for what? The educational system is complex. There are many actors and many roles to portray, not just in the actual delivery of instruction, but in the provisions of facilities, resources and budget support as well as in sensitive and responsive organizational reaction.

Can we provide answers to these questions? Can we come to feel that society's educational effort is subject to a rational determination of purpose, planning and evaluation? It will be a terrible condemnation of our society if we should determine that we have given birth to a system that defies analysis and direction. I see this issue in its broadest sense as a challenge to our rational powers as well as to our ability to control our own destiny in part. For if we conclude that the system is beyond our intellectual insight and beyond rational direction, we must be willing to scrap the system. I don't think we're at the point of scrapping it, but educational accountability is certainly a major challenge of our time.

ACCOUNTABILITY

(Prepared by ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management)

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Browder, Lesley H., Jr. Who's Afraid of Educational Accountability? (A Representative Review of the Literature). Denver: Cooperative Accountability Project, Colorado State Department of Education, 1975. 66 pages. ED 108 343 MF $0.76 HC $3.32. (Also available from SEAR, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 126 Langdon Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53702.)

Selections in this review of the literature on educational accountability are chosen from the author's own observations and individual judgment of what is important and respresentative. The work offers an overview of accountability, definitions and concepts, applications of the concept to public education, and a survey of accountability models.

Colorado State Department of Education, (Cooperative Accountability Project); and Maryland State Department of Education. Costs of Educational Accountability: A Maryland Exploratory Study. Denver; and Baltimore: 1974. 62 pages. ED 102 722 MF $0.76 HC $3.32. (Also available from SEAR, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 126 Langdon Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53702.)

An exploratory study of the cost-pricing of educational accountability components identified four components and constructed a survey instrument to obtain material from local school systems about the costs involved in actually providing information to decision makers. Smaller school systems, it is concluded, will require additional aid and technical assistance.

Howard, Eugene R. "Accountability: Who Builds the System That Works?" Speech given before New York Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development annual meeting, New York, April 1974. 33 pages. ED 098 680 MF $0.76 HC $1.95.

In the opinion of this author, it is not necessary that accountability be imposed from the state level through mandates; rather, teachers and administrators at the district and building levels, with the help of lay citizens, pupils, and the board of education, should build accountability systems that work.

Porter, John W. "The Challenge of Education--Accountability and Local Control." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National School Boards Association, Miami Beach, April 1975. 20 pages. ED 106 917 MF $0.76 HC $1.58.

The Michigan Educational Accountability Model is described as a means whereby school boards, teachers, administrators, students, and parents can predetermine what they want to do at any educational level in any program and how they hope to get there.